

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT M 00648 050239Z
ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3237
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
CINCPAC HONOLULU

UNCLAS PORT MORESBY 0648

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PP
SUBJECT: OKUK RECOGNIZED BY SPEAKER AS OPPOSITION LEADER

REF: PORT MORESBY 447

1. SUMMARY: IN A SURPRISE MOVE PARLIAMENT'S SPEAKER RECOGNIZED IAMBAKEY OKUK AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION VICE SIR TEI ABAL. SIR TEI LABELED THE MOVE AS RIDICULOUS BECAUSE OF THE MANNER OF THE VOTE AND BECAUSE THE SPEAKER MADE THE CHANGE BETWEEN SESSIONS EVEN THOUGH THE CONSTITUTION STATES THAT PARLIAMENT (NOT THE SPEAKER) RECOGNIZES THE OPPOSITION LEADER. ALTHOUGH ABAL MAY HAVE RAISED AN INTERESTING CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION, THE ISSUE OF THE LEADERSHIP COULD BE SETTLED QUICKLY AT THE NEXT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT IF NECESSARY. END SUMMARY.

2. SPEAKER DIBELA ANNOUNCED MAY 3 THAT HE HAD INSTRUCTED THE CLERK OF PARLIAMENT TO MAKE ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES WHICH WILL GIVE EFFECT TO RECOGNITION OF IAMBAKEY OKUK AS NEW LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION VICE SIR TEI ABAL. THE SPEAKER STATED PARLIAMENT ACCORDED RECOGNITION TO OKUK MARCH 21
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WHEN A MAJORITY OF THE OPPOSITION INDICATED SUPPORT FOR OKUK, ADDING THAT HE HAD NOT MOVED SOONER OMKADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES AS HE WAS AWAITING FOR THE TWO SIDES TO ARRANGE AN AMICABLE TRANSITION. THIS DID NOT OCCUR SO HE FORCED THE CHANGE.

3. SIR TEI ABAL PROMPTLY LABELED THE SPEAKER'S ACTION AS

"OUTRAGEOUS", SAYING THE SPEAKER HAD MADE TWO SERIOUS MISTAKES. FIRST, HE (ABAL) SHOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN TIME TO RALLY HIS SUPPORTERS. "IF ANY OPPOSITION MEMBER CAN PICK HIS TIME WHEN HIS SUPPORTERS ARE PRESENT AND DEMAND RECOGNITION AS LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION WITHOUT ANY NOTICE, THEN THE POSITION...COULD CHANGE ALMOST DAILY AND THIS IS RIDICULOUS." SECOND, ABAL SAID DIBELA SHOULD HAVE RESUMED THE SITTING AND PUT THE QUESTION TO PARLIAMENT. HE THOUGHT IT ABSURD FOR THE SPEAKER, SIX WEEKS AFTER PARLIAMENT ROSE AND THREE WEEKS BEFORE IT MEETS AGAIN, TO MAKE SUCH A DECISION. FINALLY, ABAL CLAIMED TO HAVE TWENTY VOTES, MORE THAN SUFFICIENT, LINED UP TO SUPPORT HIM AT THE MAY SESSION.

4. COMMENT: THE CONSTITUTION SIMPLY SAYS "THE 'LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION' MEANS THE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT (IF ANY) RECOGNIZED BY THE PARLIAMENT AS BEING THE PRINCIPAL SPEAKER ON BEHALF OF THOSE MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT WHO ARE NOT GENERALLY COMMITTED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT IN THE PARLIAMENT." THE SPEAKER'S ACTION RAISES AN INTERESTING CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ONLY PARLIAMENT CAN RECOGNIZE THE OPPOSITION LEADER. IN THIS CASE THE SPEAKER ALONE DID SO AND ON THE BASIS OF A DIVISION AMONG OPPOSITION MEMBERS AND NOT A VOTE OF PARLIAMENT. HOWEVER, IF SIR TEI PRESSES HIS POINT, THE PARLIAMENT CAN RESOLVE THE MATTER QUICKLY IN A VOTE IN UNCLASSIFIED

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NEXT SESSION.
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